

**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: MANAGING  
MORE THAN ONE IN THE SAME ORGANIZATION**

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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## **Abstract**

This research project examined organizational culture in the workplace. Specifically, the effects that multiple organizational cultures have on Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue's (PBCFR) organization. The purpose of the research was to evaluate specific ways to institutionalize organizational culture within PBCFR.

Evaluative research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes organizational culture?
2. How important is organizational culture within an organization?
3. Are there specific steps that can be taken to institutionalize organizational culture within an organization?

The procedure employed was a literature review of journal articles and books that examined organizational culture in the public and the private sector. Personal interviews were conducted with PBCFR senior staff to determine their feelings about our organizational culture, both past and present. A survey was sent out to nine departments that are of similar size and had a similar history of consolidation.

The results of the research showed that without a shared vision that is effectively communicated and adherence to core values, a healthy organizational culture could not thrive. Additionally, a strong organizational culture is one of the most critical aspects of a successful organization. Finally, it was found that the future success of a fire department depends on transformational change that can only occur if there is a shared vision and common goals between management and labor.

The recommendations from the research included transformational change, identifying and communicating core values, and hiring a consultant to guide necessary change.

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## INTRODUCTION

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) is located on the southeast coast of Florida. PBCFR employs over a thousand men and women who provide advanced life support rescue, fire suppression, hazardous materials mitigation, and a host of other services. The area served is 538 square miles with a population of approximately 500,000 people. PBCFR provides this service with a current budget of 92 million dollars.

Prior to 1984, fire protection in Palm Beach County was provided by twelve different tax district departments. The Florida Legislature mandated that the tax district departments consolidate, and on October 1, 1984 Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue was formed. That consolidation merged twelve autonomous fire departments into one emergency service provider. With that consolidation came twelve different ways of providing emergency service and perhaps even more significant, a clash of twelve different organizational cultures.

### **Problem Statement**

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue has been in existence fifteen years as of October 1, 1999. During that time, PBCFR has experienced the growing pains of any new organization, including the assimilation of twelve different organizational cultures. Today, PBCFR still does not have a unified organizational culture. In fact, H. W. Brice, Palm Beach County Fire Rescue Administrator, feels that the department currently has three distinct organizational cultures (personal communication, July 6, 1999). The problem examined by this Applied Research Project was the effects that multiple organizational cultures have on Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate specific ways to institutionalize organizational culture within Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue. Evaluative research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutes organizational culture?
4. How important is organizational culture within an organization?
5. Are there specific steps that can be taken to institutionalize organizational culture within an organization?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Background**

On October 1, 1984 twelve different tax district fire departments ceased to exist and became Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue, a 485 person department with a 45 million dollar budget. However, they ceased to exist in name only. An interview with the fire department administrator, H. W. Brice (personal communication, July 6, 1999) about the early years of PBCFR revealed concern about the impact so many different organizational cultures would have on the success of the new organization.

Four months prior to consolidation deputy chiefs, division chiefs, and battalion chiefs were appointed, with representation from each tax district department. Each chief had his own management style and philosophy and in many cases, his own agenda. They met each day to develop operating guidelines for the new department. There was little time to worry about the effect so many different organizational cultures would have on the new

fire department (personal communication with Battalion Chief M. Kemp, August 4, 1999).

Obvious symbolic steps were taken to bring about uniformity. The apparatus were all painted the same color, everyone received new uniforms and personal protective equipment, and a patch was designed that the majority of people accepted. This uniformity did little to bring about significant change in regard to a unified organizational culture. In fact, there was animosity and distrust between personnel that worked for the former tax district fire departments.

### **Past Impact**

During the first two years of PBCFR's existence a rather authoritarian style of management was employed. This was the most practical way to manage the organization during the initial transition. One of the biggest problems the new administration faced was day to day operations. Every decision made was a new decision, and it was a tedious process wading through the daily minutia. Peters and Waterman Jr. (1982) studied companies that had merged and found that "the problem is every decision is being made for the first time. The top people are inundated with trivia because there are no cultural norms" (Peters and Waterman, Jr., 1982, p.76).

In the early years emphasis was placed on developing a uniform way of providing emergency service, not an easy task given the history and pride of each tax district fire department. Because of the size of the organization, emphasis was placed on company officer development in the hope that uniformity would have a trickle down effect on the troops. This approach was fairly successful, and we now have an efficient and uniform approach to emergency service.

Once the department was providing a uniform level of service, emphasis was placed on developing an organizational culture that would transcend the many different cultures present at that time. Facilitators were brought in and worked with the company officers to help establish a new culture, a new way of doing business. What was not obvious at that time was the difficulty of this task. Group dynamics training, leadership training, and open forums where the problem of different organizational cultures was discussed were all attempts to bring people from diverse backgrounds together. These initiatives met with varying degrees of success. Some officers were active participants in initiating change, others were actively opposed to any change, and many were neutral and made no effort either way. These attitudes were brought back to the troops where the beginning of the three cultures we now have was first formed.

### **Current Impact**

The three organizational cultures that were identified by Chief Brice can be closely aligned along geographical battalion lines that correspond with the old tax district departments and with the former employees of those districts. The northern most battalion, despite the influence of a no nonsense battalion chief, still reflects the attitudes of the tax district departments that served that area prior to consolidation. They serve a mostly rural population, the call volume is very low, and the unofficial slogan from the troops is 'the pay's the same.' Perhaps the most significant factor affecting the organizational culture of this battalion is the seniority of the personnel. Most people have over twenty years of service and are approaching retirement. They are very set in their ways.

The central battalions provide service to a predominately middle class area with pockets of low-income neighborhoods and light industrial businesses. The call volume is very high, with significantly more fire activity than the other battalions. Perhaps the most significant factor affecting organizational culture in these battalions is the majority of personnel were hired post consolidation so they have no frame of reference to an old organization. They are the most homogeneous of all the battalions.

The geographic boundaries of battalions four and five in the south part of the county represent one of the largest and most progressive of the old tax district departments. They serve a very wealthy clientele, and the tax base in this area supports a good deal of the department's overall budget. This is a point of contention with a lot of the personnel working in these two battalions, and there is still a feeling that the citizens would be better served by the old tax district department. Significantly, they were the best paid and the best equipped and lost money and benefits at consolidation. These two battalions are considerably more vocal than the other battalions, and the personnel are quick to voice their opinion on different issues. Their culture, especially battalion five, has a reputation as being radical and outside the main stream of the department. Crew morale in battalion five is probably the highest of all the battalions.

When consolidation first occurred, Chief Brice had a vision of a more participative management style. He hoped a more open style of management would serve as a foundation for a change in organizational culture. After the first two years a real push was made to change to a more participative style of management. And for the next five years this proved effective throughout the department. Unfortunately, the honeymoon was short lived. Contentious labor issues served to erode the advances made toward a unified



organizational culture that was clearly beginning to work during the early years of consolidation.

A retreat of senior fire department staff in January of 1997 attempted to identify some of the more serious issues facing the department. An interview with Battalion Chief S. Jerauld (personal communication, October 12, 1999) revealed that this retreat was marginally successful. A consultant was used to help identify problems and work toward solutions. The consultant suggested that more work needed to be done on identifying a vision of where we were at the present time and where we wanted to go in the future. The consensus from staff was that the department had already done that and there was no need to do it again. The consultant felt otherwise and predicted that the initiatives that came from the retreat would fail. Committees were formed to address a range of issues, including an Esprit De Corps committee that was asked to examine organizational values. All of these committees initially had enthusiastic participants, but that enthusiasm quickly waned and the committees are now defunct.

The biggest impact that three organizational cultures have on the department is a break down in effective communication. This is manifested in a number of different ways, but perhaps the most significant is the way any communication or new initiative is met with skepticism and distrust. Recently this skepticism and distrust has been exacerbated, again, by various contract disputes. Not surprisingly, the disputes have had a unifying effect on the majority of employees. Whether this will help unify organizational culture remains to be seen.

### **Future Impact**

It is not clear what the future impact of this problem will have on the department. If we continue to have the communication problems we now experience, progress and new initiatives will be slowed. Each year some of the old guard retires and each year we hire more personnel. As more people leave and as new people come into the system, the opportunity to develop a unified, strong organizational culture increases.

There is a core of young fire officers that have long recognized the lack of a single organizational culture as one of PBCFR's greatest problems. These officers are beginning to assert their authority and their views in areas that have department wide impact. In time, these officers will move into upper management positions where change will be easier to effect.

A number of lieutenants have been promoted in the past two years, and all of them went through an Officer Candidate School (OCS). One of the goals in OCS was to emphasize the importance of participative management. Feedback and generally high morale from crews working for these new lieutenants supports the initiatives of participative management taught in OCS. This is the beginning of a shift in organizational culture and a step toward a more unified organizational culture.

Chief Brice had a vision of a participative management style that would transcend all the different styles of management inherited from the various tax district departments. Through this management style he hoped to develop a culture of openness, a pro-active approach to problem solving, and dedication to ideals that would make Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue a leader in the fire service community. Unfortunately, that vision is

no longer a goal that everyone understands and strives for. It has become clouded by poor communication, distrust, and divisiveness on the part of both management and labor.

Several areas of planning were studied during the Executive Planning class. Strategic planning and program management were examined in detail. It is clear that early strategic planning did not address the problems associated with multiple organizational cultures merging into one organization. Early strategic planning may have identified and alleviated many of the problems PBCFR currently faces. Program management may be useful if this research project shows ways to assimilate different cultures into a single organizational culture.

Vision was also discussed in Executive Planning. Having a clear vision of the future and being able to communicate that vision to all of the people within an organization is vital to the success of an organization. PBCFR has not been able to communicate a clear vision of the future that can be readily identified by members of the department.

Also discussed in Executive Planning was the need to identify root causes of problems before any attempt is made to correct the problem. Research is the first step in identifying the root cause of any problem. A thorough understanding of the problem may lead to solutions that will strengthen the organizational culture at PBCFR.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **What constitutes organizational culture?**

Flower (1995) interviewed James C. Collins who had completed a six-year study to determine what constitutes a great company. He discusses some key concepts that he considers the building blocks of organizational culture. The first is to be a clock builder, not a timekeeper. The builders of the clocks are the leaders in an organization who have the ability to create a vision that everyone can see and understand. The second concept embraces core values. The founders of great companies like 3M, General Electric, Motorola, and Walt Disney were visionary leaders who understood that core values were just as important as the products they were producing. For instance, William McKnight of 3M felt that innovation should be a core value and fostered this through his 15 percent rule, which states that everyone can spend 15 percent of their time being innovative. The post-it notes that everyone uses are a result of that type of thinking. The third concept is a philosophy that embraces ideals that are usually thought of as mutually exclusive. For instance, the idea that a company can have a high quality product or service and still keep production costs low is a foreign concept for most people. The fourth and perhaps most important concept is seeking consistent alignment with organizational values. In early 1980, Ford Motor Company lost over 3 billion dollars in a three-year period. Senior management met with representatives from all areas of the company and after long philosophical discussions produced a Vision Statement, a Mission Statement, and a Guiding Principles Statement that everyone in the company embraced. They turned the company around by re-examining the core values of the company and creating a vision that excited people.

Umiker (1999) found that organizational culture is the way things are done when there are no supervisors around. It is values, beliefs, and norms that are shared by a majority of people in an organization. The true culture of an organization is revealed in how employees, customers, and the community are treated.

Rumizen (1998) describes the creation of an organizational culture as an ongoing journey, not a project that can be brought to completion. Integral to this idea is a code of ethics. Buckman Laboratories was one company studied by Rumizen and they likened the company to a ship, with their code of ethics as the ship's waterline. The employees understood that they could not shoot below the waterline because that would sink the ship. They were allowed to change the superstructure all they wanted, if it served the customers needs.

Siegel (1998) defines organizational culture as the way things are. It all depends on who the driving force is behind an organization's culture, but it is a set of behaviors that the majority of people display. Values and beliefs that everyone identifies with drive healthy organizations. Disparate values and beliefs drive unhealthy organizations.

### **How important is organizational culture to the success of an organization?**

Peters and Waterman, Jr. (1982) studied hundreds of corporations and found a common thread ran through every successful organization and was absent in unsuccessful organizations. They found that a strong organizational culture was critical to corporate success. In fact, the study cites corporate culture as the dominating factor and states "without exception, the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of the excellent companies" (Peters and Waterman, Jr., 1982, p. 76).

Phoenix, Arizona Fire Department employees receive a publication called *The Phoenix Fire Department Way* (1992). It is a handbook that clearly outlines the guiding principles of the department. By accepting employment with the Phoenix Fire Department, all employees are expected to understand and follow “the fundamental principle that our members are the foundation of this organization. The department can be no better or stronger than its membership” (*The Phoenix Fire Department Way*, 1992, p. 4). The handbook also emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility and leadership, both formal and informal, as critical factors in the success of the organization.

Kirkham (1997) studied fire department management in regard to organizational culture and found that perspective has a great deal to do with success. Management must understand that what they perceive as a clear initiative or goal may not be understood by the troops. Open communication is vitally important for any initiative or goal to be successful. Management must also understand that any major initiative will take careful planning, dedication, and constant attention to detail or the initiative will die. Lastly, he noted that initiatives may not always originate from management. If initiatives come from the troops as a result of problems within a department, leadership can be undermined and a dysfunctional organization could be the result.

Higgs & Kapelianis (1999) found that ethics and organizational culture are inter-related. Without a code of ethics that employees have helped institute, organizational culture suffers. Conversely, without a strong organizational culture, the ethics of an organization suffers.

Rumizen (1998) examined how Buckman International Laboratories, Inc. changed from a command and control management style to one of employee participation. Key to

their success was the fostering of two-way trust between management and the workforce. This trust started with a declaration that they were going away from being product oriented to becoming customer focused. They accomplished this by shifting decision making to the customer's point of contact, the sales associate. This transition occurred over a period of time and began with top management's absolute commitment to the process. One significant finding was the reliance on timely communication that was gained through better computer networking. A strong organizational culture was noted as being an important part of this process.

Umiker (1999) studied the importance of organizational culture and found that the wrong culture can sabotage an organization. He equated the wrong culture to a bureaucratic mindset that fosters mediocrity and blame. The right culture helps instill productivity through empowerment. He found that culture exists at every level of an organization. Without a strong, pervasive organizational culture, the sub-cultures that exist in every organization can be counter-productive.

Siegel (1998) feels that identifying personality traits of people who are successful leaders in an organization is one way to figure out corporate culture. He found this is an evolutionary process as these leaders expand their sphere of influence. He also found that a good way to measure the importance of culture in an organization is to look at how much time top executives spend worrying about it.

Thompson (1998) examined corporate mergers and the influence that different corporate cultures can have on a new organization. A survey of 162 organizations involved in mergers found that 69 percent of human resource directors found their biggest challenge was integrating different organizational cultures. The most contentious

problem was communication and a critical factor in the success of the merger. The survey also showed that senior management paid too little attention to substantive communication with the employees.

A study on the importance of corporate culture in mergers found that 70 percent of mergers fail to achieve their anticipated value because not enough attention was paid to the people-related aspects of the merger. The human resource department is rarely involved in the strategic planning process associated with assimilating different corporate cultures (Anonymous, 1999; Emde, 1998).

**Are there specific steps that can be taken to institutionalize organizational culture within an organization?**

Cook (1998) studied organizational culture in fire departments and noted that changing a department's outward symbols such as the color scheme of apparatus means little unless there is a change in fundamental beliefs and culture. He noted this is a difficult process that involves exceptional leadership and followership. He emphasized the importance of followers, the troops, in the success or failure of new initiatives. He found the future success of a fire department depends on transformational change that can only occur if there is a shared vision and common goals between management and labor. He defined transformational change as a paradigm shift in beliefs and norms that everyone in the organization understands and is excited about. He cautioned that constant attention to the new beliefs and norms by fire department leaders is critical for cultural change to occur. He found that organizations that did not constantly focus on new beliefs and norms slipped back to old ways of doing business.



Broemme (1995) examined the consolidation of the fire departments in Berlin, Germany after the Berlin Wall came down on October 3, 1990. The Berlin Fire Brigade, founded in 1851 as the Royal Prussian Fire Brigade, is the oldest professional fire brigade in Germany. After 40 years of separation, a reunification process started with reciprocal visits of firefighters to examine operational areas of concern. Although East Berlin had no paramedic service and the fire department was part of the police service (Ministry of Interior) the firefighters were similarly trained. The biggest difference was pay scale, which is still being addressed. Broemme found that despite huge differences in organizational culture precipitated by the political environment, firefighting capabilities were very similar. It was also noted that despite political differences, the pervasive culture of universal camaraderie found among firefighters of all nations was alive and well and contributed significantly to an amicable transition back to a unified fire service.

Umiker (1999) found that institutionalizing organizational culture starts by gaining insight into the current culture. Understanding where to start is vital, and various surveys can help with this process. Management and employee climate surveys, internal client surveys, and customer satisfaction surveys can help define an organization's culture. The surveys can then be used as a benchmark to help move an organization in a positive cultural direction. Umiker found that employers who are concerned about their culture manage by vision and values rather than strict reliance on rules. They also recognized the need for strong lateral relations in an organization rather than hierarchical authority to exert influence. He also found that choosing leaders that are passionate about their work and who empower those around them have a direct bearing on how culture is institutionalized within an organization.

Solomon (1998) examined mergers and found that human resource managers play a pivotal role in the success of merging organizations with different corporate cultures. Communicating a clear strategy and creating a unified corporate culture through labor and management collaboration can ease the transition and help meld different cultures.

Hiring a consultant to ease the transition involved with different cultures coming together during a merger can be useful. Consultants experienced in corporate mergers bring skills to deal with cultural clashes that are not normally found within an organization. Consultants also bring an unbiased perspective, which is critical to the process. Recognizing and addressing potential conflicts in corporate cultures can be the difference between success and failure (Anonymous, 1998; Harper, 1998).

Project management was found to be useful as a specific way to manage the merging of different corporate cultures. Key to this success is to begin the integration of the different organizations before the merger is completed and assign one person as the project manager. Beginning with an assessment of the different cultures within the organizations is critical to identify potential obstacles (Ashkenas, DeMonaco, Francis, 1998; Legare, 1998; Walker, 1998).

Davenport (1998) found several ways to meld several different cultures into one institutionalized culture. He maintains that timely information, top down involvement, and integrity can engender an environment of trust that will lead to a unified culture. Breaking with the past and mobilizing people for change are crucial aspects of this process.

### **Literature Review Summary**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate organizational culture in the workplace to determine whether there are specific ways for PBCFR to assimilate the multiple organizational cultures that currently exist within the organization into one unified culture. The literature review examined organizational culture in various fire departments as well as in the corporate world. Most of the literature reviewed was beneficial and had a positive influence on this project.

All of the literature had a common theme emphasizing two-way communication as one of the cornerstones of bringing diverse cultures together to facilitate creation of a single unified culture. Also emphasized was the need for senior management to recognize and plan for the difficulties presented when merging different companies with different cultures and to have a vision of success that everyone understands and embraces.

Thompson (1998) surveyed 162 organizations involved in mergers and found that 69 percent cited integrating different organizational cultures as their biggest challenge. The most contentious problem was communication and also a critical factor in the success of the merger. The survey also showed that senior management paid too little attention to substantive communication with the employees.

Other studies found that not enough attention is paid to the people-related aspects of corporate mergers. The human resource department is rarely involved in the strategic planning process associated with assimilating different corporate cultures (Anonymous, 1999; Emde, 1998).

It is clear from the findings of others that PBCFR would benefit from attempting to unify their organizational culture. Organizations that have a strong, unified culture are

generally more successful than those organizations that have weak or multiple organizational cultures. It is also clear that there are specific steps that can be used to bring different cultures together when merged into a single organization. Project management and the use of consultants was found to be useful when merging different organizational cultures (Anonymous, 1998; Anonymous, 1999; Ashkenas, DeMonaco, Francis, 1998; Davenport, 1998; Emde, 1998; Harper, 1998; Legare, 1998; Walker, 1998).

The findings show that organizational culture is important within an organization and the findings also show that there are specific ways to institutionalize culture within an organization. These findings had a significant influence on the project. It was shown that properly focused leadership, a vision of success, and good two-way communication can help multiple cultures within an organization become assimilated into a unified culture. Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue is capable of focusing their energy and attention on this problem to bring three separate cultures together to form a single organizational culture.

## **PROCEDURES**

The desired outcome of this research was to determine the importance of organizational culture in the workplace and identify specific steps that PBCFR could employ to assimilate multiple organizational cultures into a single organizational culture. Evaluative research was used to determine what constitutes organizational culture, the importance of organizational culture in the workplace, and whether there are specific steps that can be taken to institutionalize organizational culture within an organization.

Final results of this project were arrived at after reviewing the literature and the results of the survey instrument.

A literature review was conducted at the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Further review was conducted through Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach, Florida. Journal articles on organizational culture in the public and the private sector were obtained through inter-library loan.

Interviews with Herman Brice, Fire-Rescue Administrator and fire department senior staff were conducted. A general discussion about organizational culture was held with each person, and specific questions were asked that related to the past and present culture of the department and the importance of organizational culture in general.

A survey was conducted of departments that had undergone consolidation (Appendix A). It was not possible to identify with any degree of accuracy the number of fire departments in this country that have consolidated in the past fifteen years. Queries were sent to the International Association of Fire Chiefs, The National Fire Protection Association, the United States Fire Administration, the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, and the International Association of Fire Fighters. None of these organizations had any useful data on fire department mergers over the past fifteen years. The IAFF was the most useful. They were able to provide a list of locals that had merged. From that list this researcher was able to identify nine departments of similar size to PBCFR that have consolidated. The survey was sent to each of these departments. They were given six weeks to complete the survey. Only two responses were completed and returned.

There were two limitations that had an adverse affect on the research. First was the difficulty in obtaining information about the number of departments in this country that have consolidated their services. It would have been useful to have a complete list of departments, thus allowing a more complete examination of organizational culture within merged fire departments. The second limitation was the poor response to the survey.

## **RESULTS**

### **Research question 1: What constitutes organizational culture?**

Organizational culture can be defined in many different ways, but there is a common theme that was found throughout the literature. Values, vision, beliefs, and honest communication were all found to be a part of a healthy organizational culture. Flower (1995) found that vision and core values are two of the most important aspects of organizational culture. Without a shared vision that is effectively communicated and adherence to core values, a healthy organizational culture cannot thrive.

Umiker (1999) describes organizational culture as the way things are done when there aren't any supervisors around. He goes on to say that organizational culture is a set of values, beliefs, and norms that a majority of people share in an organization, and a true test of culture is revealed in how employees, customers, and the community are treated by the organization.

Siegel (1998) found that organizational culture depends on who the driving force is within an organization. He describes it as a set of behaviors that the majority of people display. He noted that healthy organizations have strong values that everyone identifies with and unhealthy organizations have no consistency in their values and beliefs.

Rumizen (1998) views organizational culture as an evolutionary process that is ongoing within an organization. He found that a code of ethics is a useful tool in establishing parameters for employee behavior. However, simply establishing a code of ethics is not enough. The members of an organization must understand that the ethics are guiding principles that cannot be violated without endangering the organization and its culture.

**Research question 2: How important is organizational culture within an organization?**

All of the literature reviewed showed that a healthy organizational culture was vital to the success of an organization. Peters and Waterman, Jr. (1982) found that a strong organizational culture was critical to corporate success. In fact, their study cites corporate culture as the dominating factor in successful organizations.

The Phoenix, Arizona Fire Department published a handbook that every employee receives called *The Phoenix Fire Department Way* (1992). It outlines the guiding principles of the department and clearly explains how important organizational culture is to the success of the department. Chief among them is the importance of individual responsibility and leadership, both formal and informal, as critical factors in the success of the organization.

Kirkham (1997) studied fire department management in regard to organizational culture and found that perspective has a great deal to do with success. Kirkham found that communication, planning, dedication, and attention to detail are critical factors in the success of an organization. He warns that counter productive initiatives may come from the rank and file if there is a lack of leadership from top management.

Higgs & Kapelianis (1999) found that without a code of ethics that employees have helped institute, organizational culture suffers.

Rumizen (1998) found that a key factor to the success of an organization was the fostering of two-way trust between management and the workforce. One significant finding was the reliance on timely communication that was gained through better computer networking. A strong organizational culture was noted as being an important part of this process.

Umiker (1999) studied the importance of organizational culture and found that culture exists at every level of an organization. Without a strong, pervasive organizational culture, sub-cultures can be counter-productive.

Siegel (1998) found that identifying personality traits of people who are successful leaders is an important part of organizational culture. He noted that this is an evolutionary process. As leaders expand their sphere of influence organizational culture can benefit.

Thompson (1998) examined corporate mergers and found the most contentious problem was a lack of communication. He found that senior management paid too little attention to substantive communication with the employees.

A study on the importance of corporate culture in mergers found that 70 percent of mergers fail to achieve their anticipated value. It was found that the human resource department is rarely involved in the strategic planning process associated with assimilating different corporate cultures (Anonymous, 1999; Emde, 1998).

**Research question 3: Are there specific steps that can be taken to institutionalize organizational culture within an organization?**



Cook (1998) studied organizational culture in fire departments and noted that changing a department's outward symbols means little unless there is a change in fundamental beliefs and culture. He found the future success of a fire department depends on transformational change that can only occur if there is a shared vision and common goals between management and labor. He defined transformational change as a paradigm shift in beliefs and norms that everyone in the organization understands and is excited about and cautioned that constant attention to the new beliefs and norms by fire department leaders is critical for cultural change to occur.

Broemme (1995) examined the consolidation of the fire departments in Berlin, Germany after the Berlin Wall came down on October 3, 1990. He found that despite huge differences in organizational culture precipitated by the political environment, firefighting capabilities were very similar. It was also noted that despite political differences, the pervasive culture of universal camaraderie found among firefighters of all nations was alive and well and contributed significantly to an amicable transition back to a unified fire service.

Umiker (1999) found that institutionalizing organizational culture starts by gaining insight into the current culture. Management and employee climate surveys, internal client surveys, and customer satisfaction surveys can help define an organization's culture. The surveys can then be used as a benchmark to help move an organization in a positive cultural direction. Umiker found that strong lateral relations in an organization are more beneficial than hierarchical authority to exert influence over culture. He also found that choosing leaders that are passionate about their work and who empower those

around them have a direct bearing on how culture is institutionalized within an organization.

Solomon (1998) examined mergers and found that human resource managers play a pivotal role in the success of merging organizations with different corporate cultures. Communicating a clear strategy and creating a unified corporate culture through labor and management collaboration can help meld different cultures.

Hiring a consultant to ease the transition involved with different cultures coming together during a merger can be useful. Consultants bring an unbiased perspective, which is critical to the process (Anonymous, 1998; Harper, 1998).

Project management was found to be useful as a specific way to manage the merging of different corporate cultures. Key to this success is to begin the integration of the different organizations before the merger is completed and assign one person as the project manager (Ashkenas, DeMonaco, Francis, 1998; Legare, 1998; Walker, 1998).

Davenport (1998) found that timely information, top down involvement, and integrity can engender an environment of trust that will lead to a unified culture. Breaking with the past and mobilizing people for change are crucial aspects of this process.

### **Final Conclusions**

It is clear from the literature reviewed that organizational culture is important. Organizational culture can be defined so that employees understand what it is and organizational culture was shown to be a critical factor in the success of an organization. The literature showed specific techniques that can be used to help an organization assimilate different organizational cultures into a unified culture.

## **Survey Results**

Two fire departments out of nine responded to the survey. Due to the limited response, the results will not be in table form. Due to confidentiality, the names of the departments will not be used.

A total of 12 departments were merged in the first department and 38 in the second. One merger occurred in 1981, the other in 1996. Both departments have a similar number of employees with approximately 1250 paid and volunteer at the first and 1050 paid at the second department. Both departments are still having difficulty assimilating different organizational cultures into one culture. One department did go through a planning process to address concerns associated with merging organizational cultures, but it was not successful because the information did not get to the company level. The other department did no planning. Both departments still have multiple organizational cultures, and they both feel that it has not directly affected service delivery; however, it has negatively affected both organizations at the staff level. Both departments noted that tradition is alive and well and has been one of the biggest obstacles to bringing different cultures together. Questions 8 and 9 ask about unified cultures. Neither department felt they had a unified culture. One respondent noted that they seem to be reacting to issues, rather than planning. Both respondents felt that different organizational cultures in the same organization can be both positive and negative. Positive in the sense that different cultures force people to examine issues in different ways, but negative in the sense that many times people are working against each other rather than towards the same goal.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Relationship between study and findings of others**

The survey results, although limited, have a close correlation with the findings in the literature review and with our own experience within PBCFR. Both organizations noted difficulty in assimilating different organizational cultures into one culture but also noted that service delivery was unaffected. The difference in cultures appeared to have the biggest affect on efficiency at the staff level. Broemme (1995) found this to be true in his research of fire department re-unification in Berlin. Although the political climates were vastly different, firefighter camaraderie is the same the world over and firefighters will get the job done, regardless of culture.

Poor planning or no planning was also found to be a factor that affected assimilation of different organizational cultures and the success of the organizations in general. Communicating the process to the troops was not done and resulted in ineffectual planning. The literature reviewed showed that human resource managers could be instrumental in affecting change and in helping organizations assimilate different cultures. Also noted was good planning with top down communication is vital to the success of a new organization (Davenport, 1998; Solomon, 1998). Peters and Waterman, Jr. (1982) noted that a strong organizational culture is the single most important criteria for success in an organization.

### **Interpretation of study results**

Examination of the survey results, comparing the results to the literature, and then looking at my own organization has shown a remarkably similar experience dealing with multiple organizational cultures merged into one organization. It appears that fire

departments are good at mitigating emergency situations, but as an organization, fire departments are not adept at managing their human resources. Tradition was mentioned by one survey respondent as an impediment to their success. The old adage about the fire service having two hundred years of tradition unimpeded by success may be truer than we care to admit.

### **Organizational implications**

The results of this study imply that the fire service has not done a good job managing consolidation from a human resource perspective. Implications for Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue is that we are no better or worse than other departments that have gone through a similar process. We still continue to respond to emergency calls and do a very good job mitigating the emergency needs of the public. Fire departments tend to focus on external customer service more than internal customer service. Similar emphasis needs to be placed on internal customer service. Employee morale and productivity seem to go hand in hand. Better internal customer service would strengthen our organization and would be a first step in unifying our cultures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue recognizes that multiple organizational cultures are a problem within the organization. The research supports the idea that a strong, single organizational culture is one of the most important factors for an organization to be successful (Peters and Waterman, Jr., 1982).

Flower (1995) talked about a vision for the future and honest communication as some of the core values that need to be embraced for an organization to be successful. *The*

*Phoenix Fire Department Way* (1992) is a good example of putting these values into words that everyone can read and understand. PBCFR's leadership is capable of communicating a similar message to its employees.

The findings of Siegel (1998) point to the importance of personality traits. People in leadership positions can have a positive impact on organizational culture. It seems the opposite could also be true. If a person is in an influential position, but is not a good leader, his or her impact on organizational culture could have a negative affect. It is critical that leaders display the highest level of integrity.

PBCFR hired a consultant during the early years of consolidation. The literature showed that consultants and project management could be useful tools to help bring different cultures together (Anonymous, 1998; Ashkenas, DeMonaco, Francis, 1998; Harper, 1998; Legare, 1998; Walker, 1998). Perhaps it is time to once again hire a consultant.

In order for any initiative to be successful, senior management must support it and must communicate this support to all personnel (Davenport, 1998; Umiker, 1999). The Fire Department Administrator and his senior staff must be the initiators and the champions of this type of change. Before any change can occur within PBCFR, we must regain the trust that has been lost over the years. This would be one way to begin that process.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Organizational Culture Survey**

1. How many departments were merged into one organization?
2. When did the merger occur?
3. How many people does your department employ?
4. Did your department have difficulty assimilating different organizational cultures into a single organization?
5. Did your department go through a strategic planning process to address concerns associated with merging different organizational cultures?
6. Do you have multiple organizational cultures within your department?
7. If you have multiple organizational cultures, what effect do these cultures have on the efficiency of the department?
8. If you have a unified organizational culture, can you identify specific processes that helped you assimilate different organizational cultures into a unified organizational culture?
9. How long did it take to assimilate multiple organizational cultures into a unified organizational culture?
10. Do you perceive different organizational cultures within the same organization as a problem?

October 1, 1999

Attention:  
Address

Dear Chief...

I am enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I am conducting research on the effects that multiple organizational cultures may have within an organization. It is my understanding that your department has merged with other departments, and I am interested in learning how that process has affected your department.

Your consideration in completing this survey will give me a broader understanding of the effects of organizational culture in the workplace. The survey results will be incorporated into my research paper; however, the names of the departments responding to the survey will not be used. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your assistance and consideration. Please complete and return the survey by November 15, 1999.

Sincerely,

Christopher T. Howes